

TRANCE, ART & CREATIVITY

By John C. Gowan

(Creative Education Foundation, Buffalo, 1975)

Reviewed by Roger D. Snyder

This book is the third in a trilogy by John Gowan. The first book was *The Development of the Creative Individual*; the second, *The Development of the Psychedelic Individual*. This latest volume, *Trance, Art and Creativity*, deals with the relationship between the "numinous element" (Spirit of man) and the ground of being. More accurately, "How to get in touch with the ground of being . . . without losing ego-consciousness."

Gowan actually lays out a taxonomy in his book which ranges from a state of complete cognitive/personal chaos or disintegration (e.g., schizophrenia) through other dissociative and trance-like modes, to a middle ground where the relationship with the conscious ego is stronger (e.g., dreams), to a final mode where there is some cognitive control and maximized integration (e.g., mystic states).

This spectrum is carefully fitted into the framework of H. S. Sullivan's three modes: the prototaxic (experience occurring before symbol formation); the parataxic (experience using symbols in a private or autistic way); and syntactic (experience which is communicable).

A brief chapter opens with the idea that localizing human consciousness within a particular ego in a given place at a set time may be illusory. However, Gowan concludes, setting up separate selves, immersed in space and time in a universe of physical percepts must somehow help us to a sense of free will, personal growth and cognitive or syntactic representation. His last remark in this chapter combines a lot of Eastern and Western thought when he says that these three human tasks must directly bear on the main business of the universe: a full cognition of the All by the All.

Gowan, in what follows, exhaustively treats each of the three modes noted above. The first mode, the prototaxic, is characterized by loss of ego. It includes such phenomena as schizophrenia, trances (including mediumistic and shamanistic types), hypnosis, psychedelic drugs and sensory deprivation. He then treats the paranormal effects often found in ego loss states, including ESP, hallucinations, healing (including psychic surgery), fire mastery, psychokinesis, and out-of-the-body experiences. A subsection on glossolalia and automatic writing and one on the religious trance close this first main section of the book.

The second mode, the parataxic, is characterized by the production of images whose meaning is not clear or categorical and includes archetypes, dreams, myth, ritual and art.

The final mode, the syntactic, is seen best in those situations where meaning is more or less fully cognized symbolically, with the ego present. It includes siddhis, ESP, telepathy, precognition, auras, healing, out-of-the-body experiences, traveling clairvoyance, levitation, psychokinesis, tantric sex, creativity, biofeedback, orthocognition, meditation, ecstasy, and the unitive stages of transcendental union.

This detailed description of the book's contents gives some idea of Gowan's scope and the depth of his research. His effort throughout the book is to group paranormal phenomena (from schizophrenia to mystic states) under Sullivan's three modes so that the phenomena are situated on a spectrum moving from proto- through para- to syntactic.

To say it differently: the spectrum moves from chaos where ego is absent and/or not in control to a final stage where ego is present, though—as attested by mystics both Eastern and Western—it may not be in control. At this last level there is a "junction of the individual and general mind, duality is abolished and through knowledge more and more complete, the one becomes the other."

This book comes at just the right time. Today more and more paranormal phenomena are coming to light for serious study. In addition, we are entering a new stage of "psi liberation" in which people are willing to bring out of the closet their personal psi experiences. At this time, more than ever, we need more John

Gowans who can begin to put the universe back together again, and link up psi phenomena, altered states of consciousness and other paranormal events that at first blush seem to be unrelated. This book, along with other books in Gowan's trilogy, is a big step in the direction of a badly needed synthesis in this burgeoning field.

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